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Letter dated 7 May 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I would like to draw your attention to the attached letter regarding the declaration of 2009 as the "Year of Our Native Land" in Belarus (see annex).

I would appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 49.

(*Signed*) Andrei **Dapkiunas**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

09-33132 (E) 110509 110509

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Annex to the letter dated 7 May 2009 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

At a time when, at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the Commission on Sustainable Development is discussing issues which, to a large extent, must be successfully addressed in order to secure the future of humanity and the sustainable development of continents and regions (improvements in agricultural efficiency and conservation of land, water and other vital natural resources), I have the honour to inform you and the States Members of the United Nations of the initiative in Belarus to declare 2009 the "Year of Our Native Land".

The objective of the Year of Our Native Land is in line with one of the most important cross-cutting tasks of the Commission on Sustainable Development: protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development. In addition, this initiative is intended to be a tool for stimulating sustainable development by preserving and building on cultural and historical assets.

Bearing in mind the agenda of the Commission on Sustainable Development, I should like to describe briefly the events taking place in Belarus as part of the Year of Our Native Land.

Agriculture and rural development

Agricultural and rural development in Belarus is not a sectoral task but a nationwide priority. Precisely for that reason, a comprehensive State programme for rural regeneration and development for 2005-2010 was adopted in 2005 with a budget of $35 billion. Through the implementation of the programme, relatively high indicators have been achieved in the agricultural sector of the economy. Agricultural production accounted for more than 8 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008, an increase of almost 9 per cent compared to 2007. Even in the context of the global financial and economic crisis, Belarus's agricultural sector is showing some growth.

Land, water and other natural resources

Steps are being taken in Belarus to tackle the causes of land degradation, such as large-scale logging and the clearance of land for agriculture and urban development (deforestation), overexploitation and unsustainable agricultural practices.

One of Belarus's specific difficulties is the need for large-scale measures to prevent the degradation of land affected by radioactive contamination as a result of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986. In this connection, active efforts are being made to rehabilitate areas contaminated with radionuclides and to develop and implement protective measures in agriculture.

We view sustainable systems of crop and livestock farming as an effective barrier to the abuse of ecosystems. They also ensure the necessary conditions for the conservation and expansion of forest and water resources and biodiversity, the preservation of natural landscapes and climate control. This type of effective

management of natural resources gives grounds for optimism about the wide use of new and renewable sources of energy in Belarus in the future.

Ensuring sustainable development by preserving cultural and historical assets

During the Year of Our Native Land, numerous historical and architectural monuments in Belarus will be restored and the construction of sociocultural infrastructure will continue. The measures which we plan to take will not only make the appearance of towns and villages more attractive but will also improve the environmental situation in the country as a whole.

We plan to take steps to regenerate and develop specially protected natural territories, including the Belovezhskaya Pushcha nature reserve, which is unique in the world and whose 600th anniversary falls in 2009.

The culture of taking a civilized approach to the environment is inextricably linked to the history of our homeland. In 2009, Belarus, having defeated fascism like the rest of the world, will mark the sixty-fifth anniversary of the country's liberation, which can be regarded as one of the turning points of the Second World War. We consider the patriotic education of young people in a spirit of respect for the origins of our national history, language and culture to be the essential long-term foundation for the sustainable and progressive development of State and society in Belarus.

I should be grateful if you would circulate this letter as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 49 [illegible] a document of the seventeenth session of the Commission on Sustainable [illegible]pment.

(*Signed*) Andrei **Dapkiunas**